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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KINSHASA 000005

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SUBJECT: THE DRC'S KIVUS CONFERENCE -- HARBINGER OF PEACE,
TALKFEST, OR TACTICAL PLOY?

Classified By: DCM Samuel Brock. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (C) Summary: The "Conference on Peace, Stability and Development in North and South Kivu" opens January 6 in Goma amid great fanfare. President Kabila made the decision to convene the Conference, which ruling coalition hardliners had attempted to stall indefinitely in hopes of ending the insurgencies in the Kivus by military means, only after the army suffered a humiliating defeat and seemed incapable of further military action. With little political support in the Kivus and almost no resources, the Government was unable to finance and organize the event and has delegated those tasks to members of Parliament and prominent individuals from the region, the United Nations and the international community. Having ceded control over much of the Conference to others, the Government has limited ability to guide it towards specific outcomes. The organizers themselves are unclear as to what they want to accomplish. Just two days before the conference opens there are no rules of procedure, no rosters of experts to chair the event's many sessions, and no lists of topics to be discussed. The Government and the insurgents continue to re-supply, rearm, and redeploy their forces; one cannot dismiss outright the hypothesis that the Government cynically endorsed the Conference as a tactical ploy to buy time. Participation in the Conference by Senior Advisor for Conflict Resolution Tim Shortley will help to ensure focus and results. We believe the appropriate U.S. role is to help build confidence among the Conference's many actors; to propose and win support for processes that will engage participants after the Conference has ended; and to work closely with the international community to secure the resources needed to implement the decisions Conference members agree on. End summary.

The National Kivus Conference: at long last

12. (SBU) In early December the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) launched an offensive against the insurgent force in the province of North Kivu headed by Congolese Tutsi General Laurent Nkunda. The FARDC was quickly repelled, with thousands of troops abandoning their units. The total number of desertions is estimated at 6,000-9,000 individuals. President Kabila decided shortly after the failed offensive to convene the long-awaited "Kivus Conference on Peace, Stability and Development" to bring together representatives of all sectors, including political officials, tribal leaders, parliamentarians, ranking clerics, and even representatives of insurgent groups. Originally scheduled for December 26, the Conference was postponed until after the

end-of-year holidays due to insufficient lead time to ensure proper preparation. It is now scheduled to begin Sunday, January 6, and will last until January 14.

13. (C) The idea of a Conference to help resolve the Kivus insurgencies (Nkunda's rebel force is but one of a large number of insurgencies in the two provinces) has been a high priority for the Congolese government (GDRC) since May, 2007.

Disputes between the executive and legislative branches, NGO's and other interested parties over the agenda, scope of work, who is invited to attend, and other contentious issues resulted in indefinite postponements of the Conference. Many hardliners in the Kabila government, including late political advisor Samba Kaputo, Defense Minister Chikez, and special diplomatic advisor Seraphin Ngwej, were happy to let the date of the Conference slip further and further away in the hope that military action would succeed in neutralizing Kabila's insurgency, which they believe to be the greatest threat among the many insurgent groups in the two Kivus. The defeat of the FARDC put into sharp focus the Government's inability to defeat Nkunda in the short term and the need to prevent him from making further gains. We believe these considerations were the key factors in President Kabila's decision to go forward with the Conference.

Reaching out for assistance

14. (C) Unable to organize the Conference on short notice and lacking the resources needed to carry it off, Kabila reached out to parliament, particularly Chamber of Deputies President Vitale Kamerhe (himself a native of North Kivu); Azarias Ruberwa (from South Kivu), a former Vice-President of the Transitional Government and self-appointed leader of the

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DRC's Tutsi community; and Catholic priest Apollinaire Malumalu, a North Kivusian who is also the president of the country's Independent Electoral Council. The organizers have in turn reached out to the United Nations Mission in the Congo (MONUC) and the donor community for financial and technical support. The United States has provided \$300,000 to date, primarily to purchase office equipment and provide clerical services. Other major donors include the United Kingdom, the EU, and Canada. MONUC will assist with travel and logistics and will also provide security.

15. (SBU) An appeal for international staff to serve as facilitators and technical experts was also made. We do not yet have details on the response to this request. We understand, however, that the Catholic Church-based conflict resolution institute Sant' Egidio will provide support. The Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington may also support the Conference. Many ambassadors to the DRC based in Kinshasa are expected to attend the opening ceremony of the Conference in Goma on January 6. We also expect Great Lakes Region special envoys from Belgium and the European to participate. Finally, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer's Senior Advisor for Conflict Resolution, Tim Shortley, will participate in the Conference from January 10-14.

Are some groups being excluded?

16. (C) With two days remaining before the Conference opens, a number of important technical and substantive issues remain unresolved. In a lengthy meeting with former Vice-President Ruberwa on January 3, the Tutsi leader painted a shady picture of poor preparation; uncertainty regarding the Conference's purpose and goals; strong disagreements over who should facilitate and chair sessions; attempts to exclude Tutsis from full participation as officials, experts and regular attendees; and pressure by the Government to influence the outcome. Ruberwa asserted that he had argued strongly for facilitation by outsiders to ensure neutrality but had been outvoted by Malumalu and Kamerhe, who preferred

Kivusian facilitators. A slate of Conference officials was agreed on, Ruberwa said, that consisted of Kamerhe, as president of the conference; Ruberwa, as vice-president and chair of the "Commission des Sages" (a policy advisory committee); and Malumalu, as vice-president and head of the Commission's secretariat.

17. (C) Ruberwa said that the organizers gave their list of Conference recommendations to Marcellin Chissambo, Kabila's senior diplomatic advisor, for forwarding to the President. Chissambo, Ruberwa stated, then drafted a report on the recommendations reassigning Ruberwa from head of the "Commission des Sages," a policy body, to become instead head of the Conference secretariat, a technical body. Chissambo also reassigned Malumalu to become Conference president. Ruberwa interpreted Chissambo's move as anti-Tutsi, as well politically motivated because Ruberwa, alone among the three organizers, is not a member of a party belonging to the President's AMP coalition (Alliance pour la Majorite Presidentielle - a group of several parties that supports Kabila). By giving both policy jobs to persons who support the President, Ruberwa argued, Kabila was preventing the Opposition from playing an important role in the Conference. (Note: Ruberwa's assertion that Malumalu has political affiliations is debatable; although criticized by some for his support of Kabila during the 2006 elections, he was given high marks by international observers for his role as impartial president of the National Electoral Commission. Also, Kamerhe, whose party is a member of the AMP, has nonetheless strongly opposed many of Kabila's legislative initiatives as president of the lower house of Parliament. End note).

18. (C) Ruberwa argued further that the decision to demote him as a Conference official went far beyond a personal attack against him as a Tutsi; it was also an effort to keep Tutsis from playing their rightful role in the Conference. He asserted that given anti-Tutsi sentiment in the Kivus they would never be elected by other participants to head committees or sub-committees nor would they be hired as technical experts. They should not be allotted the same participation numbers as other ethnic groups, he insisted, but instead be given a "special quota" to "ensure equitable

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representation." He also accused the government of naming only one Tutsi to a minor position in the Conference, a political person who is a member of a pro-Kabila party. Ruberwa said he spoke with Kabila on December 24 to challenge the new designation of officers but has not yet heard whether his concerns will be met. He informed the Ambassador he is considering boycotting the Conference altogether and asked for U.S. intervention vis-a-vis Kabila. We wonder if Ruberwa, if he attends, plans to withdraw from the Conference in the event he take exception with any decisions that, he believes, are unfavorable to his community's interests. This scenario would seem to be supported by recent communiqués issued by the CNDP, a political organization backing Nkunda, which has accused the Conference of bias against Tutsis.

What are the Conference's real goals?

19. (C) Several other technical issues remain unresolved. According to Ruberwa and other sources, as of January 4, the Conference does not yet have rules of procedure, rosters of experts to chair many sessions, or approved lists of topics to be discussed. More importantly, there appears to be a lack of focus on goals and outcomes. Ruberwa's thesis is the Conference's goal is simply "to do whatever is necessary to end the war." But such a lofty objective requires specific proposals with details on the roles of concerned parties, timelines for implementation, benchmarks on progress towards completion, and projected costs. Instead, based on media reports and other sources, there is far too much emphasis at this point on who is qualified to participate in the Conference; on how competing groups (ethnic, religious,

NGO's, etc.) should be equitably represented; on debates over causes of the problem rather than on solutions; and on competing theoretical approaches to resolving problems that are very concrete and real.

Security concerns

¶10. (C) Another major concern relates to security and the conflict itself. Media reports indicate that the FARDC and a number of armed groups are taking advantage of the lull in fighting since the Conference was announced to re-supply, rearm, and redeploy their forces; one cannot dismiss outright the hypothesis that the Government cynically endorsed the Conference as a tactical ploy to buy time. Although there are no indications any military actions are planned for the period January 6-14, any slight rise in the political temperature in the highly-tense province of North Kivu could result in a flare-up, with deaths and thousands of new internally displaced persons (IDP's). It is also rumored that tensions at the Conference itself could lead to violence in Goma. Embassy has dispatched the RSO to Goma to do a site survey of Conference locations to ensure that U.S. participants (the ambassador, senior advisor Shortley and the Goma political officer) have access to professional advice should riots or other forms of violence occur. RSO Kinshasa will remain in Goma as long as he is needed and the situation warrants.

A strong U.S. role -- critical for success

¶11. (C) Participation in the Conference by Senior Advisor for Conflict Resolution Tim Shortley will help to ensure focus and to make participants aware of the need to achieve results. Embassy believes the appropriate U.S. role is to support the GDRC as it endeavors to organize and carry out a credible Conference. We have done so through USAID and via expressions of support from the Department's spokesman, the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs and her senior advisor. We should also help build confidence among the Conference's many actors as they participate in the Conference. The presence of the ambassador, the Goma political officer and senior advisor Shortley will help to accomplish this. We should propose and win support for processes that will engage participants after the Conference has ended. Senior Advisor Shortley will work with Conference organizers in this endeavor. Finally, we must work closely with the international community to secure the resources needed to implement the decisions Conference members agree on. We note that senior advisor Shortley, supported by

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Embassy Goma officer and USAID and OFDA officers, will remain in Goma after the Conference is over to begin follow-up work with Congolese interlocutors.
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